

SAFE SANCTUARY PREVENTION POLICY

Bethany United Methodist Church

Introduction

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of sexual abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes [a] child ... welcomes me" (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones ... , it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6). Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that "children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse" (, 162C).

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse ("ritual abuse" refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation within churches.

Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong.

(From *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church-2000*; pages 180-81.

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Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults in our church.

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

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Amended: January 2021

Policies

- **Criminal Background Investigations**

- The pastor in charge or his/her designee and the staff parish relations committee are charged with the responsibility of developing, implementing, and evaluating the process for recruiting, screening, selecting, training and supervising non-appointive church staff.
- All paid staff must have a criminal background investigation.
- All volunteers, who work with children or youth, must have a criminal background investigation.
- All paid staff and volunteers who work with children and youth must complete Bethany's Safe Sanctuary Training prior to beginning their work.
 - Training is available on-line (consisting of a video and quiz) or in person.
- The CDC will follow all DSS regulations regarding background checks.
- Background checks will be run every three years for both staff and volunteers.
- Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for children, youth or vulnerable adults.

- **Reference Checks**

- All paid staff, who work with children or youth, must provide an employment application that provides at least three personal character references not related to the employee. These references must be checked and logged with the application.
- All volunteers, who work with children or youth, must discuss the scope of the position with the director of the ministry/program.
- All forms and references will be kept as part of an individual's record, either in hard copy or digital format.

- **Training Requirements**

- All paid adults who serve in a supervisory capacity with children or youth must have training in First Aid and CPR as set by a nationally recognized body such as the American Red Cross.
- All adults, paid or volunteers, who work in any capacity with children or youth must complete Safe Sanctuaries training at least every *three* years.
- Each staff and/or volunteer must sign a Participation Covenant acknowledging they have read, understand, and will abide by the Safe Sanctuary Policy.
- Each event where children or youth are present will have at least one person certified in CPR and First Aid.

- **Age Requirements**

- All adults who work in a supervisory capacity with children or youth must be at least 18 years of age, and no less than 5 years older than the children or youth being supervised.
- Youth under the age of 18 may be employed or volunteer leaders of younger children as long as an adult over 18 is available and when combined with adequate training on church policies and procedures.

- **Adult Presence Requirements**

- No adult is ever to be alone with a child or youth.
- There are to be a minimum of two adults present wherever ministry with children, or youth or challenged adults takes place. This applies to classroom activities, activities away from the church facility and when transporting children and youth.
- All efforts will be made to recruit a sufficient numbers of volunteer leaders as to permit team teaching.
- When it is not possible to have two leaders present, a designated roamer will monitor rooms.
- A married couple is considered two adults.
- Any church sponsored or community group who meets at the church facility should have two or more leaders present whenever possible.

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- If there are both girls and boys in attendance, every effort should be made to have both male and female leaders present.
- If a group stays overnight at the church, or if a church group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must be present.
- If a group stays overnight and is a mixed gender group, there must be at least one male and one female leader.
- If a leader finds themselves alone with a child or youth, they should immediately seek out another adult.
 - If another adult cannot be located, they should call the staff person responsible for the program they are involved with and remain on the phone with them until another adult can be physically there.
- No unauthorized visitors will be allowed in rooms in use by children/youth.
 - This does not include parents, clergy, and church staff.
- At any counseling session with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open the entire session. Parents should also be notified when counseling sessions will take place.
- Certified aides or therapists are covered by DSS guidelines
 - Must provide paperwork showing certification through DSS
 - Must complete Bethany's Safe Sanctuary training to ensure that they are familiar with our policies
 - The two-adult rule will not apply to certified therapists and aides as indicated in DSS policies.
- **Touch**
 - Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child.
 - Side-by-side hugs are suggested.
 - Appropriate touching is acceptable only in public.
 - Touching should be initiated by the child or youth.
- **Nursery**
 - All nursery staff will be paid employees of the church.
 - Nursery rooms will follow all Safe Sanctuary policies.
 - Diapering will occur in public area – in full view of other nursery staff.
 - If a child needs help using the restroom, the restroom door must remain open.
- **Gym**
 - The two adult rule applies to activities in the gym including basketball practice, games and camps.
 - Gym restroom use must follow all Safe Sanctuary practices during camps and practices.
 - On basketball game days, the restrooms are considered public restroom and parents should monitor their children.
 - Coaches should not go into the restrooms at any time if children are in the restroom, especially if a child is showering or changing clothes.
 - Physical conduct can be used to assist in skill development or is for the child's safety.
 - Celebrations of wins or consolations of losses are part of sports – coaches and leaders should use appropriate responses and be aware of how it can be interpreted.
 - Check-in/out sheets will be provided to coaches and camp leaders and must be used.
 - Appropriate motivation and coaching techniques should be used at all times.
- **Restroom Use**
 - Leaders should take at least two children to the restroom at a time.
 - Leaders will clear the bathrooms, ensuring that there are no adults present.
 - Children should be sent in to use the restroom while leaders remain at the door to prevent adults from entering.
 - Leaders should never go into the restroom when children are in the restroom.
 - If there is an emergency, or another reason that an adult must enter the restroom, adults should make every effort to have another adult with them.

- If a child needs assistance, the door must remain open and another adult in the vicinity of the restroom.
- **Facilities Requirements**
 - All rooms in which ministry with children or youth takes place must have windows in either doors or walls, through which the room is visible. This window is to remain unobstructed at all times.
 - Where a door to a room does not have a window, the door must remain open so long as only one adult is in the room.
 - All areas where children under the age of 5 are present will have security cameras; cameras must remain on whenever children are present; cameras must feed to monitors in locations where there are personnel to monitor.
 - Exterior doors in the church will remain locked when children are present.
 - Exception on Sunday Mornings when the church is open for worship.
- **Off-Site Requirements**
 - Whenever ministry with children or youth occurs off-site of church property, there must be a minimum of three adults present.
 - There must at least one adult, in addition to the driver, on each bus if passengers are under 18.
 - All bus drivers must be approved to drive the church vehicle.
 - No drivers of vehicles transporting children/youth will use their cell phone while driving, including texting, making or receiving calls, or working GPS while the vehicle is moving.
 - Passengers under 16 should not ride in the front seat of the bus.
 - No youth should drive other youth to/from events.
 - A married couple is considered two adults.
 - Safe Sanctuary policies should be followed as the venue allows.
 - Volunteers should transport children or youth in their personal vehicles only if previously arranged, in an emergency situation and with parental permission.
 - Adults should never be alone in a vehicle with a child or youth.
 - All children and youth participating in out-of-town and over-night outings must have written consent and a current medical release form on site.
 - Medical release forms must be renewed annually.
 - Access to a phone or cell phone must be available at all times.
 - Any outings involving water will have a certified lifeguard accompanying the group.
 - Females and males will have separate sleeping quarters.
 - With the exception of parent/child combinations, a leader and child/youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.
- **Check-in/Check-Out Procedures**
 - All children 5th grade and below must be checked into and out of each activity/group.
 - Sign-in/out rosters will be provided for each group/activity either in hard-copy or through a tablet in all areas.
 - All children must be signed-in/out in person by an authorized parent or designated person; no telephoning or texting.
 - Children 4th grade and up may sign themselves in/out with both teacher and parent approval prior to the event/activity.
 - Siblings 5th grade and younger are not allowed to sign-in/out younger children.
 - Rosters must accompany groups at all times.
- **Discipline**
 - No physical punishment or verbal abuse are to be used at any time.
 - Only measures such as talking to the child, guiding a child to another activity, placing a child at a table away from others will be used.
 - If necessary, the staff person in charge of the event/program will be notified and parents will be brought in to discuss the behavior.
- **Social Media and Communication**

- All Safe Sanctuary policies apply to Social Media communication, including Zoom, Skype, Messenger, Facebook, and so forth.
- All online activities should use an official church account, not a personal account.
- In order for adults in leadership to post images/videos of children or youth on social network sites, prior written permission must be granted by parent/guardian.
- Photos taken during events must not be tagged with names or other identifiers of children or youth, or with location indicators. All images and videos must be within the spirit of our ministry.
- All electronic communication – including but not limited to phone calls, emails, texts, social media and app messages – will be delivered as a group or with a parent copied. There will be no one-on-one electronic communication between an adult and a child or youth.
- Should an adult in leadership receive a private phone call, text or other electronic message from a child or youth that is questionable, the adult should end the conversation and offer an opportunity to have the conversation in person and in compliance with this policy.
- Do not post anything on social media that you would not publish in the church newsletter or bulletin.
- All contact on Social Media should be initiated by the child/youth.
- Parental approval is required for communication with any child under the age of 13; this includes phone calls, texting, messaging, or contacting through Social Media.
- **Virtual Meetings**
 - All meetings should include at least 2 adults. No meeting should be held between one adult and one child.
 - All participants should dress appropriately.
 - Parents must give consent for any child participating in virtual meetings. No child under 16 can create an account to participate in the meeting, the parent must create account.
 - Parents should be home while children are attending the session.
 - No one should record any virtual meetings.
 - All participants – leaders and participants should disable the anonymous chat function. No leaders or participants should send private messages that are not seen by the larger group.
 - Virtual meetings should take place in a public part of the house, not a bedroom.
 - All meetings should be created with a password and only share invite link within the group.
- **Bullying Policy**
 - Actions considered bullying will be identified by the following definition:
 - Aggressive behavior that involves unwanted, negative actions.
 - Involves a pattern of behavior repeated over time.
 - Involves an imbalance of power or strength.
 - A person is bullied when he/she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more persons, and he/she has difficulty defending himself/herself.
 - Bullying can take on many forms:
 - Verbal bullying, including derogatory comments and bad names.
 - Bullying through social exclusion or isolation.
 - Physical bullying, such as hitting, kicking, shoving, and spitting.
 - Bullying through lies and false rumors.
 - Having money or other things taken or damaged or hidden by individuals who bully.
 - Being threatened or being forced to do things by individuals who bully.
 - Racial bullying.
 - Sexual bullying.
 - Cyber bullying (via cell phone or internet).
 - When there is a suspected occurrence of bullying, it should be brought to the attention of the supervising adult present at the time of the incident by either the child, youth or adult targeted and/or any witnesses, parents or volunteers. Appropriate staff should immediately be made aware of any reports. The staff member will keep a record of any reported claims of bullying in order to document patterns or trends in behavior.

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- **Emergency Situations**
 - Refer to the BUMC Emergency Plan for instructions.
 - Follow directions of church staff.
- **Reporting Requirements**
 - Adults who work with children or youth must report immediately, any suspicion or discovery of physical, emotional, sexual or ritual abuse of a child in their care to the Department Head or the Senior Associate Pastor. In the case where the Department Head or the Senior Associate Pastor is the suspected perpetrator, the worker must report to the Senior Pastor.
 - Reports must be made immediately.
 - The designated church representative will:
 - Provide written documentation concerning the incident.
 - Notify the county office of DSS.
 - Notify the pastor in charge and/or the Staff Parish Relations Committee.
 - Give written documentation to the pastor and/or Staff Parish Relations Committee.
 - The pastor will notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps necessary to assure the safety of the child. It is important to note that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) does not wish the incident to be reported.
 - Having been reported to the proper authorities, the suspected incident is to be reported immediately to the church's attorney, insurance company and the District Superintendent.
 - The accused will be respectfully removed from further involvement with children or youth.

Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each youth will be "surrounded by steadfast love, ... established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" (From "Congregational Pledge 2," "Baptismal Covenant II," in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, page 44).